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HER MAJESTY QUEEN ALEXANDRA  
*Miniature painted at Buckingham Palace, 1904*

BY ALYN WILLIAMS, P. R. M. S.

*(See opposite page)*

## LIGHT AND SHADE IN THE MINIATURIST'S PATH

BY ALYN WILLIAMS

*President of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters*

THERE is probably more sentiment attached to a miniature than to any other form of art. It is not only a portrait but also a composite of values: at the same time a work of art, a jewel and an heirloom. It is in fact, to those who love this least-known form of portraiture in painting, the quintessence of that art, what the sonnet is to poetry. A good miniature should contain within itself all the essentials of larger portraiture combined with exquisite delicacy and beauty.

Upon the public at large, uninitiated to this point of view and demanding portable souvenirs, is perpetrated one of the frauds in the art world—that of the colored photograph purporting to be a real miniature. Time and again have I been called upon, to my embarrassment, to admire one of these spurious works of art. The owner usually insists upon their value, even after he is enlightened, because they are “painted upon ivory.” Like most others of my gild I am constantly coming across the trail of these pinch-beck “works of art,” and I am constantly amazed at the ignorance of the victims. Often they are educated people. On one occasion at a big dinner party in London, when the conversation turned upon miniatures, a lady who was sitting next to me pointed to a large brooch she was wearing, containing a spurious miniature beautifully set with diamonds.

“What do you think of my miniature?” she asked. “Where is it?” I inquired.

She unfastened her fondly cherished “miniature” from her bosom and presented me the colored photograph, insisting upon my opinion. Even after she was enlightened she was loath to believe herself duped, until I had moistened an end of napkin in my finger-bowl and washed off a portion of the drapery, showing her the photographic basis.

Then she explained that she had paid Mr. L. a well-known photographer forty guineas for it as a genuine miniature. She seemed much chagrined and as she left the dining-room I saw her pause before the fireplace and throw the ivory into the coals—much to my regret, for it would have been an admirable case for the courts and she could have at once recovered her money and exposed the thief.

In England it is the photographer who is the greatest offender in this respect, but in the United States and Canada there are many silver-tongued

travelers who wander from city to city palming off colored photographs on ivory or zylonite. Sometimes they obtain their orders by a house-to-house canvass, but their haunts are generally in the big hotels where they pose as artists and take orders for miniatures from photographs, asking only one or two short sittings, during which they go through the motions of painting—eventually delivering to their patrons more or less cleverly colored photographs on ivory. These portraits are usually turned out in a factory, their wholesale prices being from \$10 to \$15, while the so-called artist charges prices varying from \$50 to \$250.

If they prefer them, there is no reason why the public should not indulge in these little machine-made productions. They are not permanent; they lack vital and artistic qualities; but they are often quite pretty—only I would advise any one desiring them to apply to their local photographer who will be able to have them painted at a reasonable cost. To supply and sell them as genuine miniatures is to obtain money under false pretenses.

It is quite easy to obtain genuine miniatures if one desires them. America has its own Societies of Miniature Painters who hold annual exhibitions of the works of members. There are many good one-man exhibitions at the various galleries, and any reliable art dealer will gladly recommend genuine miniature painters. The public is swindled because it avoids taking a little trouble. It seems almost superfluous to add that no real artist hawks his paintings around like a street peddler. Neither is it incumbent upon him to haunt afternoon teas and society functions, for he obtains publicity by sending his work to exhibitions and, with a good dealer to act as his representative, he can devote his energies to improving his art.

No artist will paint from a photograph when it is possible to obtain sittings where he can give his own interpretation of the subject, and the latter will be interested in watching the portrait grow from the first outlines to the completed picture. Photographs are sometimes useful to the portrait painter as supplementary guides and in saving the sitter's time. They are especially useful with children, who are as lacking in self-consciousness under the camera as they are unable to sit still under long observation.

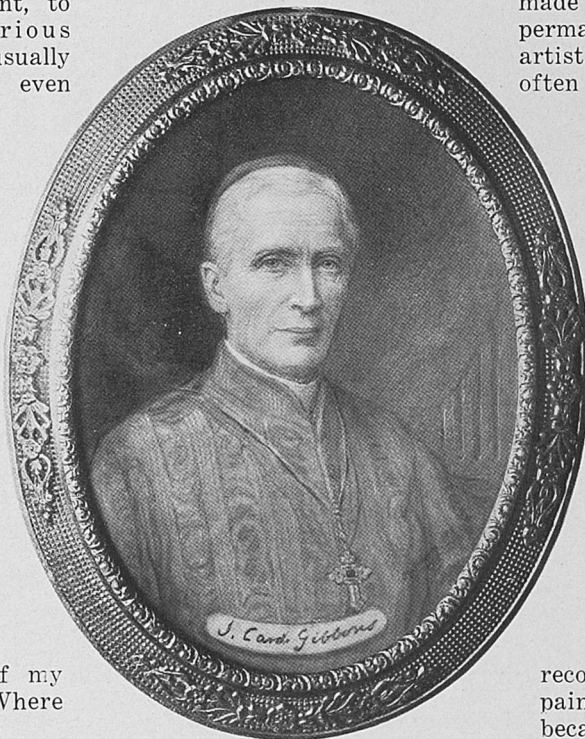


FIG. 1—CARDINAL GIBBONS  
Painted at Baltimore





FIG. 2—H. M. KING EDWARD VII  
Painted at Buckingham Palace

What artist has not had his bad quarter of an hour when left alone with a child sitter? One dear little girl of about five, whom I was painting without any guide, had to be bribed in many ways to sit still for five minutes at a time. I turned myself into a menagerie, an elephant and a camel, crawling around the nursery on all fours with her perched on my back. During the next short sitting that I had thus arduously earned her mother returned to the room and found an angelic and unmovable little girl; but I was obliged to complain. The mother reproved her severely, but she had hardly left the room again before little Consuela got down from her chair. She came up to my chair and began pounding me with her chubby fists, remarking indignantly "You dirty sneak!"

It was an illustration of the old darkey saying "*Freedery breeds despisery*" . . . which reminds me of another case in point:

While having alterations made in my studio in South Kensington, on a street where every second person you meet is an artist, one of the old carpenters failed to turn up one day and was reported to have died suddenly. The next morning the foreman came to me: "You know pore old Charley, sir, wot died? Well, we are getting up a subscription for a wreath, an' we thought as 'ow you might like to give us a trifle." The donation of the usual half crown elicited profuse gratitude and the following tribute:

"Thanky very much, sir. I knew directly I set eyes on you that you was a gentleman even if you was a hartist!"

One of the most pleasant compensations of a portrait painter's career are the pleasant ties formed with his sitters which sometimes develop into life-

long friendships. In England it is more usual than in this country for the artist to be invited to be a guest in the house while he is painting a portrait, thus affording better time and opportunity for study of the subject in different moods and phases.

Every artist comes across various forms of vanity in his sitters which sometimes take odd and unexpected forms. On one occasion I was painting an almost bald-headed man, who, after spending about ten minutes brushing his extremely scanty fringe of hair, turned and asked me gravely if the parting was on the proper side! Another time I struggled my best for two weeks to make an extremely ugly man passably good looking by smoothing out a line in one place and adding it in another, with what I considered a fairly good result. To my great surprise when he saw the miniature he was deeply offended.

"Mr. Williams" said he "this is ridiculous! Do you not know that I am—barring one—the ugliest man in England?"

"Oh!" said I "if that is what you want, you just sit there for half an hour and see how I can please you!"

The alterations were only too easily supplied and he departed perfectly satisfied with a miniature that was an absolutely unflattered likeness. So you see there still exist Cromwells in England.

Quite the opposite and quite the most curious experience I ever had was the case of Miss Margaret F. in Ireland. At the invitation of her niece, for whom the miniature was being painted, I visited them at their beautiful old house and found my sitter a charming old lady of over seventy, who must have been in her youth a rare beauty. Both she and



FIG. 3—Miss Dorsey

her niece were very learned and my memory is all the richer in recalling those delightful days and evenings listening to their conversation about books and the legendary lore and songs of Ireland, which the younger sang in a charming manner. But I could not persuade the aunt to look at the miniature. Whenever she would pass my table and easel she would look in another direction. Then I began to notice that among all the beautiful ornaments and pictures there was not a mirror in the house. Her niece told me that her aunt had not seen the reflection of her own face for over thirty years!

Of course vanity is not always confined to the sitter. One of the proudest moments of my life was when I received a command to attend Buckingham Palace to paint a miniature portrait of the late King Edward. I had previously had the honor of painting Queen Alexandra and our present Queen when she was Duchess of York; but I was more ambitious to paint the King than any one in the world because of my admiration of His Majesty's character. He received me in the Red Room at the Palace and at once put me at my ease by tactfully asking some simple question and almost answering it himself. His knowledge of miniature painting was extraordinary and he seemed to know much about me personally and the work I had done in forming the Society of Miniature Painters. He expressed pleasure that the art was again coming to the fore, to the exclusion of the false miniature on a photographic basis. I was much pleased and flattered and the miniature progressed splendidly. My self-complacency disappeared at the next sitting however. His Majesty was about to receive the homage of a newly appointed Bishop, and I overheard him asking his secretary for the slip of paper giving an outline of the Bishop's previous life and career. After the sitting I made inquiries of his Majesty's valet:

"Oh" he said "don't you know that just before His Majesty receives any stranger, one of the secretaries looks up his history and writes a short outline of it for the King to read? Then he drops a few remarks and compliments—and they go away immensely pleased."

My swelled head diminished to the size of a peanut, but I admired His Majesty's tact and kindness more than ever. Every one loved the King and the saying that "no man is a hero to his valet" was refuted by the valet himself who simply adored his royal master, and who after the King's death came to my studio and with tears in his eyes presented to me the cravat which His Majesty had worn at my last sitting!

In this miniature the King is shown as wearing his scarlet field marshal's uniform, which was placed upon a dummy as a model and hung with all his decorations, the details of which he insisted should be quite correct. When painting Queen Alexandra's portrait I found in her a genuine love and appreciation of the delicate *technique* and of the color schemes. My latest royal sitter was the little Princess Marie José of Belgium, who was living in England with her governess—an English lady—during the autumn of 1915 in an Ursuline convent that exists in a quiet little village. The Princess was a beautiful, sensitive girl of nine, quite tall for her age, but childlike, natural and impulsive, caring more for books than for dolls. Like all children

she was anxious to see the results of my work and she rushed up from her chair to look over my shoulder. As I had only been painting about half an hour she could not detect much likeness on the ivory and she exclaimed in a tone of disappointment, "*Oh, ce n'est pas moi!*"

Pushing back again to her seat she sat down on the tea-tray which the servant had brought in and temporarily placed on the chair in which she had been sitting, whereupon the little Princess was quite distressed and embarrassed and had to be comforted by her governess. I painted two miniatures from these sittings, both of which were autographed by the Princess who spent some painful moments in trying to make her handwriting small enough for the ivories. The original miniature I was fortunate enough to sell for the benefit of the *crèche* conducted by the Queen of the Belgians; the purchaser, a Philadelphia lady, thoughtfully presented the miniature to the Queen through the Belgian Minister.

In portrait painting the human element adds interest to the work. An artist should have infinite patience in wishing to give satisfaction to a client and also a certain sturdy resistance in refusing to sacrifice the truth to vanity or artistic fads of the moment. It takes both of these qualities combined with a sense of humor to steer between the Skylla of flattery and the Charybdis of caricature. Probably the true secret of success for a portrait painter lies in his ability to see the better side of his sitter's character, to tell the truth lovingly and, looking upon each subject as a possible friend, to study their features under all favorable conditions. A portrait that at first sight seems a striking likeness is rarely one that we care to live with—because it states everything at once! There is no sense of anything "beyond" to maintain the interest. One might just as well have a photograph which gives



FIG. 4—H. R. H. THE PRINCESS JOSÉ OF BELGIUM  
Painted at Brentwood, England, 1915

only a map of the sitter's face and possibly the passing expression which flits over it the moment the plate is exposed. In addition to presenting the features, there must be in a portrait some expression of the character and soul; the likeness should grow upon the observer the longer it is studied. After having given what to you is a true interpretation of the sitter, the latter may be thoroughly pleased; but soon there comes the fatal moment when the family and friends are called into consultation! Then indeed are you requested to do impossible things by enlarging the eyes or parting the lips or changing the coloring to please Aunt Jane or Cousin Thingummy—still worse, in deference to Mrs. Knowitall, "who is such a splendid art critic." Other trials the unfortunate portrait painter has to meet are the compliments paid to his sitter at the expense of the portrait. The client may be quite delighted with it in every way, but, after several friends have said "My dear, it is really not half good enough looking for you" he or she really begins to believe it. I know at least one good artist who has given up portrait work in disgust through this very thing.

A sentimental fad much in vogue in the eighteenth century was the painting of "single eye" portraits on ivory. These were mounted for brooches or lockets and lovers exchanged them as tokens of undying affection. Richard Cosway painted miniatures of the eyes of the beautiful Mrs. Fitzherbert and of the Prince Regent which they bestowed upon each other. Some years ago when I was holding an exhibition at the Dowdeswell Galleries in London my friend Dr. George C. Williamson, the celebrated expert on miniature art, asked me to paint a few; then he borrowed other examples of these quaint old *eye* miniatures which, when shown in the exhibition, caused quite a revival of the fad. The public flocked to see them, the press wrote it up in every paper and the illustrated magazine published pages

of eye portraits of celebrities, usually taken from photographs, with guessing competitions as to their owners. It was amusing at first; but after living amongst these tiny portraits for several days I felt rather in sympathy with one adverse critic who said these ever-watchful eyes made him so nervous that he wanted to get at them with a coke hammer!

England has been the home of miniature portraits more than any other country. The foundation of the Society of Miniature Painters some twenty-four years ago—to which the King granted a royal charter some ten years later—and the various histories of miniature painting written by Dr. Williamson, Dr. Probert and other writers, calling attention to the beauty of the old miniatures, caused a revival in the art, which had fallen into decline all over the world. This was partly owing to the influence of photography and partly because there were so few good miniaturists during the Victorian days. They seem to have lost the art of making a decorative little portrait and to aim only at achieving an imitation of one of large size. If it had not been for the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon, which still reserved a small space for the exhibition of miniatures, the art might have been lost. The annual exhibitions of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters and the inadequacy of the colored photograph caused a revulsion, and real miniature art again became the vogue. In America and in Paris other societies of miniature artists followed the example of the British society and the art-loving public is showing increasing interest in these exhibitions. Of course there will always be worshipers of mere bulk, and a class of people who would rather possess a large and highly colored cubist or post-impressionist picture to any miniature—even by Cooper or Malbone or Cosway, but the faddist is never a true or permanent art lover, and the good miniature like all other forms of beautiful art will remain—for it is only the real that will live for all time.

*Alyn Williams*

## IMAGES—IMAGININGS

I have no thoughts at twilight. All day long  
My brain burns out its passions. Evening song  
Is red-sown languor of long poppy fields;  
Kisses are opal tears, and Kirké yields  
"Her zone's dear sweetness" melting all her charms  
Into the triumph of Ulysses' arms.  
Star-dust is shattered out of one spent sigh,  
And flute and horn are flames against the sky.

I am not I at twilight. I must be  
The grass, the dew, the tremble of the tree  
That feels the sap astir, and I must go  
To long-lost meadows where the wind-flowers blow.

Then as, beyond the twilight, darkness hides  
All but the friendly voice whose strength abides,  
Once more they claim me, all the rush and swing,  
The groupings out of gropings, when stark Thing  
Stretches its tendrils down, strikes root and grows  
From death to life—law, beauty, love—the rose!  
Star-dust is prisoned in its crumpling maze  
And flute and horn are censers swinging praise.

And yet I love the twilight. Then I slip  
Out of my house of life to turn and dip  
With every light-heart wind before I feel  
A fuller sweep of waters lash my keel.

*Lewis Worthington Smith*